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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MODERATE IRAQI SHI'A CLERIC SUPPORTS MALIKI BUT
CRITICIZES HIS GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) John Hannah, National Security Advisor to the Vice President, met on October 19 with Ayatollah Hussein al-Sadr, a moderate Shi'a cleric based in the Kadhimiya neighborhood of Baghdad who had supported former Prime Minister Alawi's list in the December 2005 elections. Al-Sadr opened with profuse expressions of gratitude for the President and the United States for their historic accomplishment in liberating the Iraqi people from a horrible tyrant and beginning to build real constitutional democracy in Iraq. Al-Sadr described Prime Minister Maliki as an individual in glowing terms, calling him "a transparent, truthful Iraqi patriot." But he criticized Maliki's government on several grounds. First, he said, intra-Shi'a rivalries were weakening the government, as Shi'a coalition leaders, particularly from SCIRI, were not providing Maliki their full support. He also described many of the current ministers as weak and lacking expertise, arguing that they were not loyal to the Prime Minister but to their respective parties. Al-Sadr advocated that political parties be represented in Parliament but not in the ministries, thus allowing the Prime Minister to select technocratic, non-partisan ministers. He stressed that the ministries must be accountable to Maliki, who thus must be accountable to the people.

¶2. (C) Al-Sadr also lamented the interference of neighboring states. Iran, he noted, "has its tools like Muqtada (al-Sadr) and SCIRI/Badr." Though Iraqi people did not accept Iranian interference, he continued, "they have a great amount of dollars to spend so they are able to accomplish some things." Sunni extremists, he noted, were receiving support from Wahhabis and from Syria and Jordan. Al-Sadr stated that this interference would continue until Iraq was able to control its borders effectively.

¶3. (C) Al-Sadr also touched on the Iraqi police, national reconciliation, and federalism. He noted that the Iraqi police had too many inexperienced officers who had been unjustly promoted beyond their capabilities. Mentioning several of his personal efforts to bring

together Sunni and Shi'a religious and civic leaders over the past year and a half, al-Sadr welcomed the government's interest in reconciliation but criticized it for coming too late and expressed his dissatisfaction with Minister of State for National Reconciliation Akram al-Hakim. Al-Sadr described federalism as a hallmark of a civilized society, but noted that Iraq needed to work on improving its central government before moving further toward federalism, otherwise it would divide the country. Despite the problems he raised, al-Sadr expressed his appreciation for U.S. action in bringing democracy to Iraq and compared Iraq's current situation to that of a patient recovering from a difficult but essential surgery.

14. (U) This cable was cleared by OVPNSA John Hannah.
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